

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING, PUBLIC HEARING
& BOARD of SELECTMEN MEETING
JANUARY 9, 2008

Veteran's Park School Auditorium – 7:30 P.M.

REVISED/APPROVED MINUTES

These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.

In attendance: R. Marconi, A. Bodner, B. Manners, D. Masters, J. Plock

Notice is hereby given that a **Special Town Meeting** will be held on January 9, 2008, 7:30 P.M. at Veteran's Park School Auditorium, 8 Governor Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut to approve a utility easement on Prospect Street by the Town of Ridgefield to AT&T for telephone purposes. Minutes of the Special Town Meeting are under separate cover.

Pursuant to Article III, Section 3-5 of the Ridgefield Town Charter, notice is hereby given that a joint Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen **Public Hearing** will be held on January 9, 2008, 7:30 P.M., at Veteran's Park Elementary School Auditorium, 8 Governor Street, Ridgefield, Connecticut to discuss the petition requesting the necessary action to authorize the expansion and turfing of the Onalfo athletic fields, to appropriate up to \$1,600,000 to complete said expansion and turfing, and to authorize the issuance of up to \$1,600,000 in bonds of the Town to meet said appropriation.

Board of Selectmen Agenda (immediately following Public Hearing)

1. Recognition of Two National Champion Cheerleading Teams
2. Growing Tree Lease at Yanity – set date for PH & STM
3. Economic Development Commission Appointments
4. Building Code Board of Appeals Reappointments
5. Historic District Commission Reappointment
6. Selectman's Report
7. Linda Haines, Ridgefield Music & Arts Center (RMAC)
8. Approval of meeting minutes: 11/28/07, 12/5/07.

R. Marconi called the Public Hearing to order at 7:40 p.m., immediately following the Special Town Meeting. Marty Heiser, Chairman of the Board of Finance, came forward to read the notice for the joint Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen Public Hearing relative to the circulated petition to expand and turf the Onalfo Field Complex.

Phil Kearns, Chairman of Parks & Recreation, came forward to review this initiative being presented by the Ridgefield Youth Sports Coalition comprised of the Ridgefield Little League Baseball, Ridgefield Little League Softball, Ridgefield Youth Lacrosse, Ridgefield Youth Football, the Soccer Club of Ridgefield, and the Tiger Hollow Association, with 5,500 children playing five sports. There is insufficient field capacity to support current programs. The demand has increased as there are 1,000 more participants since 1995, and field capacity which has been flat for 12 years, has now declined. They are requesting that the Onalfo Complex be expanded and turfed, as previously recommended by Parks and Recreation. Two fields will be increased to three fields plus an increase in capacity with an increase from 40% of 1 season to 100% of 2 seasons. They maintain that synthetic turf is less costly to maintain than

grass fields, and synthetic turf is as safe or safer than grass fields. Current programs cannot fit on current fields. Field capacity has to be increased or there will have to be a reduction in programs offered. One-third will be funded directly by youth sports clubs. The estimate is approximately \$4-5/household per year to Ridgefield residents.

What about the health issue regarding synthetic turf ? – The Parks & Recreation Department reviewed the research on this subject and have discovered no significant health issues. The State Dept. of Health has indicated no reason to stop the manufacture of synthetic turf fields. Tiger Hollow and Scotts Ridge in Ridgefield continue to be used safely by town residents. Parks & Recreation supports this proposal.

What is the process? The petition was received at Town Hall on November 28. By Town Charter, a Public Hearing has to be held within 45 days which would be January 12. The Connecticut primary is scheduled for February 5, which requires that the voting equipment be sequestered for two weeks following. If both the Board of Finance and the BOS take no action, the Onalfo Field question will go to a referendum on February 26. Bond counsel has been consulted regarding this procedure.

The Public Hearing was open to the public for comments.

Jim Philbin, Sugarloaf Mountain Rd., President of the Ridgefield Youth Lacrosse program, and representing the Ridgefield Youth Sports Coalition, spoke in favor of the referendum.

Roy Messing, Silver Spring Rd., indicated his involvement with SCORE, and two children who participate in Ridgefield sports. He indicated how the shortage of playing fields has been an issue for a long time. The need for new fields is clearly established. The vote against the referendum last year did not make the problem go away. The Town Charter provides a way to bring an issue back before the voters and thus this presentation by the Ridgefield Youth Sports Coalition. When it rains, there is water sitting on the current Onalfo fields making them unsafe for playing. Ivy Hill residents have had concerns about drainage issues. Turfing will solve this drainage problem. Regarding health safety and environmental issues, the Sports Coalition has looked at the literature that is available, and have concluded that the synthetic turf fields are safe. Regarding the cost, on a relative basis, turf is the most cost effective way to go to get the most benefits. For either grass or turf, the sub-surface work still has to be done. Turf fields are available 100% of the two playing seasons of the year. Mr. Messing suggests that this issue be allowed to go to a referendum rather than a Town Meeting vote.

Bruce Chen, Blackman Rd. is President of the Ridgefield Little League. He indicated that the Little League Board of Directors and membership support the synthetic turf fields. Playing fields are the “classroom for sports”. Currently, some of the games have to be scheduled out of town as Ridgefield does not have enough playing fields.

Robert Keyes, Blue Ridge Rd. – inquired, besides the upfront cost for installation of a turf field, what is the useful life of such a field? What about the maintenance costs and upkeep required for a turf surface?

David Landers, Co-Chairman for Tiger Hollow and was involved in 2001 with the installation of that turf field, replied that the expected life cycle for a turf surface is 13 to 15 years. There is no cost for cutting, fertilizing, or re-seeding. Some rubber pellets can become smooth. The town owns a machine that is used for maintenance of the turf surface. Most of the cost is in the preparation of the sub-surface and drainage. Tiger Hollow can be used 24/7 for 9-10 months of the year. The Tiger Hollow replacement cost is approximately \$350,000.

Bob Lewitt, Alcott Way – We are being asked to accept a twenty-year bond issue. There will be a replacement cost before the twenty years are up. When a turf surface is replaced, is the surface disposable and/or recycled? We will be incurring another bond issue before the first one is paid off.

Carl Charles, Athletic Director Ridgefield High School, -commented on the benefits of turf fields. He was previously Athletic Director in Weston, CT and had experience with the turf fields there. The advantages are: 1) Available for use in all kinds of weather where natural grass is taken out of service depending on the weather. With the shortage of playing fields in Ridgefield, we are now busing to off-campus fields in town; 2) Improved safety providing cushion impact. The surface is uniform, consistent, level and dry and stays that way; 3) Reduced maintenance costs with the elimination of the need for chemical treatment, watering, mowing, re-seeding, etc. The base is 1-3 feet of gravel which allows the water to flow thru. The gravel cleans the water as the water passes thru. Scrap tires are not hazardous waste. An October 2007 article published by the Connecticut Department of Health, reported that the “public health risk seems unlikely”. It is much more economically feasible to build turf fields.

Keith Miller – The cost comparison is \$1.4 million for turf and \$1.1 million for grass.

Stacey Mesler, Old Branchville Rd. – stressed that additional investigation is warranted. She reported on an environmental impact study from the Department of Health. The turf surface is ground-up used rubber tires. There is no barrier between the rubber tire crumbs and the children. Dust particles from these tire crumbs are inhaled. New research is available from September 2007 stating that potent carcinogens are found in the tire dust. The results from a lifetime of exposure are not yet available. There are too many gaps in the available research to state that turf fields are for sure safe.

Elizabeth Butler, Old Branchville Rd. – commented on how she is personally very pro-sports and was an All-American Lacrosse player, but there is a debate about the long-term safety of artificial turf. All research is not clearly “pro”. There is a lot of evidence out there. There is a Yale connected study on children exposure to a turf field that suggests a moratorium on turf usage until further studies can be done. Connecticut’s Attorney General Blumenthal has asked for a moratorium on the installation of turf fields until further research results are in. If turf fields are found to be unsafe, Ridgefield’s turf fields would be a liability to the town. She quoted a Rutgers study, a Rochester, NY study, a 2006 independent group study in Italy which showed turf fields can be cancer causing – this research cannot be ignored. The drainage situation in every field is different. Are we currently monitoring the safety of the runoff from Scotts Ridge and Tiger Hollow?

William Osgood, Ivy Hill Rd. – commented on how the “jury is still out” on the health safety issue. We are talking about lots of dollars if turf fields are found to be cancer-causing. There may be more involved in this issue than just our desire for new fields with a new surface.

Chris Murray, Ivy Hill Rd. – stated a thank you to those who have raised questions about the health safety issue. The need for the fields is established – that is not the question. The main issue is the health of our children and the health of the environment. The Connecticut DEP will not accept rubber crumbs into their landfills. If a turf surface needs to be removed, where do we place it? Do we have a line item in our budget to cover future costs? He is concerned about the Town’s liability issue and urges a slow approach to this issue. We need to come up with a plan that can minimize liability; how can we remediate our existing fields?

John McGeary, Ivy Hill Rd. – indicated that he has personal concerns about the drainage issues. Parks & Rec. did respond to the Ivy Hill residents and did dig trenches to get water from the field away from the homes on the street. He has read the research and what Blumenthal has said, and there are concerns about

the rubber pellets. We need to look very carefully into this issue and ask ourselves if we want to take the risk. If we cannot put tires into our landfills, why would we put tire pellets in our parks? Let's go to the state and national level and get toxicologists involved. We need to be sure we have all the facts.

Karen Isaac, Virginia Ct. and a SCORE volunteer – commented on how her children have used Scotts Ridge and Tiger Hollow turf fields and have no asthma, no rashes, etc. – nothing has happened to them health-wise. Astro-turf has been around for a long time. Extensive studies have been made. There is no Lyme Disease nor ticks on artificial turf. She believes turfing is the answer. There are problems from the moisture in grass.

Aryn Elizabeth Cluney, Saint John's Rd. – commented on how the maintenance issue has not been adequately addressed – the costs of a redo in 8-10 years, the process of putting down sand and herbicide on the turf surface. With regard to safety, a survey of soccer players has indicated that they prefer grass. Recent studies indicate injury statistics on turf fields. Another issue is how Ridgefield is trying to “be green”. How else can we support our green environment? Installation of additional turf fields is not “being green”. Let's find additional space for playing fields and do it now!

John Pavain, Berthier Place – is a Ridgefield Lacrosse coach and involved with Ridgefield Youth Football. There is an urgent need for increased fields. When it rains, he lives in fear of injuries for the football players. We are now up to eleven teams. There is constant switching of fields because of safety issues when the weather is bad.

Bob Thomas, SVP Pro Grass – was not permitted to speak. The Public Hearing is for residents only.

John Noonan, North St. – commented on how Ridgefield's playing fields are so crowded because children are starting to play organized sports at much too early an age. Children should just go out to play and not be involved in organized sports until at least six years old. This would also result in less driving for the Moms!

Phil Kearns responded to some of the points raised: 1) questions about current maintenance to our two turf fields – the Parks & Rec. Department have maintenance to the turf fields as part of their maintenance schedule and not as much is involved as discussed. 2) there are no other large open spaces in town for new fields – Parks & Rec can tell residents what locations they have looked at.

Paul Roberts, Topstone Rd. – is a member of SCORE and has two children involved in the sports program. His job is as a VP for Environmental Health & Safety. He has been on both sides of similar issues and deals with health questions every day. We need to remove the bias and emotion and take a scientific approach to this issue. We need to look at the facts and read every study. There is a large volume of studies and statistics available for quite a few years – the breadth of work is significant. There are oral exposure, dental exposure, inhalation exposure studies, quantitative and qualitative, national and international. We need to look at the studies done by organizations that have “no stake in the game” – not studies done by tire companies. Is this a new issue? No! He believe there have been sufficient studies done. The studies have not shown a hazard above the acceptable level. Risk = hazard x exposure. Regulatory organizations and state agencies are saying little or no risk. We have to educate ourselves and look at multiple sources and the breadth of information. He believes the turf fields are safe and the risk is insignificant.

Dave Landers, as Co-Chair for Tiger Hollow, indicated that they studied for one year national and international studies and literature; they went to manufacturing facilities, and studied safety issues for the athletes. The product is very inorganic. There is a lot of data out there. Mr. Landers provided notebooks

of their data, which includes the latest from the Synthetic Turf Council, official position statements from regulatory agencies and sports authorities. He believes turf fields are safe and contribute to the community.

Andrew Lomburdusi, Acre Lane – stated that the residents turned down this referendum just last year. It is not the time to try again. We need to find additional solutions.

Jennie Carr, Mallory Hill Rd. – stated the need to slow down and take a careful look at this issue. ROSA changed their position because of the health threat to children and the environment. She suggests that no new turf fields be installed until all the studies are in. Why rush this project when answers still need to be found? Plus the cost! Please limit our children’s exposure!

David Welborn, Ivy Hill Rd. – commented on how this is the same proposal as before which was voted down six months ago. There are still no big donors – all the taxpayers are paying for this. We need to find a different solution.

Phil Bauman, Keeler Dr. – expressed his concern about safety for the children. There have been studies in New York and Connecticut listing the chemicals which cause immune system damage and resultant cancer. How long does the testing need to occur before we can say that the exposure is for sure harmless? It is important to not have chemical interference at the time of puberty and that is the time when the children would be using the synthetic fields the most. Blumenthal’s position is being researched and there seems to be serious questions there. We need to wait and see what comes out from these studies as well.

Chris Murray, Ivy Hill Rd. – stressed how when our children are involved, we cannot take emotions out. There is a serious increase in Mersa – turf fields don’t necessarily cause it but there is a significant increase in this disease. Even if there is no definitive scientific evidence at this time against turf fields, he recommends that no action be taken at this time.

Andy Seymour, Mallory Hill Rd. – stated that this is a time for caution when there might possibly be a risk. We need to look for a solution to avoid risk. Our youth need to learn teamwork. We are not entitled to everything we want. Sometimes it rains and sometimes our fields are crowded.

Aryn Elizabeth Cluney – We need to stop, look and reassess. Red flags have been raised from a study done at Rutgers with the New Jersey DEP on the tire crumbs.

Ted Peatt, Mamasasco Rd. – doesn’t like paying for someone else’s sports habit. We need to pay as we go.

Elizabeth Butler – encourages the careful study of the risks and further studies. What are the long-term effects? What if there is a problem and the town is left liable?

R. Marconi stated that the comments from the public are concluded.

D. Masters asked Paul Roche about the disposal cost issue and the maintenance costs. We need to put the actual costs out for the public to see. These numbers are pertinent for decision-making.

R. Marconi closed the Public Hearing at 10:00 p.m. and called the Board of Selectmen Meeting to order.

Board of Selectmen Meeting

1. Recognition of Two National Champion Cheerleading Teams

Approximately 75 members of the two Ridgefield National Champion cheerleading teams came forward to be recognized for their achievements. R. Marconi expressed congratulations to both teams and their coaches – Level 10 and Level 12 - for their victories on the local, regional, state and national levels. Level 10 won the national championship for the second year in a row. These victories are a very special achievement for the Town of Ridgefield. R. Marconi awarded a plaque of recognition to each team.

2. Growing Tree Lease at Yanity – set date for PH & STM

The proposed lease is between the Town of Ridgefield and The Growing Tree Nursery School, LLC for 1,120 square feet in the Town of Ridgefield’s building known as “Yanity Gym” for a period of five years. Ann Lucero, the Tenant, was present to receive comments on the wording of the lease. A. Bodner raised a question about the rental rate of \$18 sq. foot and the cost of utilities. It was suggested that there be one amount for the base rent and one amount for utilities based on the square feet being leased. The utility component is subject to change as utilities go up (or down). Utilities are costly now. The lease’s wording will be changed.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to set a Public Hearing for January 23, 2008 and a Town Meeting for February 6, 2008, relative to the proposed lease between the Town of Ridgefield and The Growing Tree Nursery School, LLC, for 1, 120 sq. feet in the Town of Ridgefield’s building known as Yanity Gym, contingent upon the re-wording of the lease as discussed at the January 9, 2008, Board of Selectmen Meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

The lease between the Town of Ridgefield and the Chef’s Warehouse will be reviewed at the Board of Selectmen Meeting on January 23, 2008. Chef’s Warehouse believes that they are being charged too much.

3. Economic Development Commission Appointments

There are two vacancies on the Economic Development Commission (EDC). Interviewees include:

10/3/07	Alex Karsanidi and Ginny Carroll
12/5/07	Bill Maxwell and Thomas Hayes

Chairman, Bob Cascella has had to resign to accept his newly elected position to the Board of Finance. The vacancy will be advertised.

D. Masters moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to appoint Bill Maxwell to fill a vacancy for a one-year term on the Economic Development Commission. Motion passed 5-0.

4. Building Code Board of Appeals Reappointments

Terms on the Building Code Board of Appeals are purposely staggered as to expiration dates. **J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to reappoint Peter Coffin to 1/01/09, Val Ericson to 1/01/12, and Joseph Fossi to 1/01/13 to the Building Code Board of Appeals. Motion passed 5-0.**

5. Historic District Commission Reappointment –

D. Masters moved and B. Manners seconded a motion to reappoint Andrea Jabara for an additional five-year term to the Historic District Commission. Motion passed 5-0.

6. Selectman’s Report –

R. Marconi indicated that he had nothing to report other than the FAA discussion with the Board of Finance scheduled for January 15, 2008.

7. Linda Haines, Ridgefield Music & Arts Center (RMAC) –
Linda Haines, President, of the Ridgefield Music & Arts Center (RMAC), came forward to describe the formation of RMAC, a 501© 3 corporation, whose purpose is to provide a permanent venue in Ridgefield for the teenagers and young adults to gather to express their artistic talents, whether it be music, art, dance, poetry, etc. The old train station building built in 1870 is being donated by the Price family of Ridgefield Supply, who will move it to its new site. A search is currently being undertaken to secure an appropriate central location. A. Bodner expressed support for the program but stated the need to use property that would not be appropriate tax-base property. A program director would schedule student and young adult performances and displays on an on-going basis. All youth performances will be chaperoned to maintain a safe, drug and alcohol free environment. Adults can also use the venue during the school year on school nights to exercise and perform their musical and artistic talents. Sponsors and fundraising will be the source of income to cover operating expenses.

8. Approval of meeting minutes: 11/28/07, 12/5/07
J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to table Agenda Item #8, Approval of Meeting Minutes, 11/28/07, and 12/5/07, until the next Board of Selectmen Meeting on January 23, 2008, due to the lateness of the hour. Motion passed 5-0.

J. Plock moved and D. Masters seconded a motion to adjourn the Board of Selectmen Meeting at 10:30 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet L. Johnson